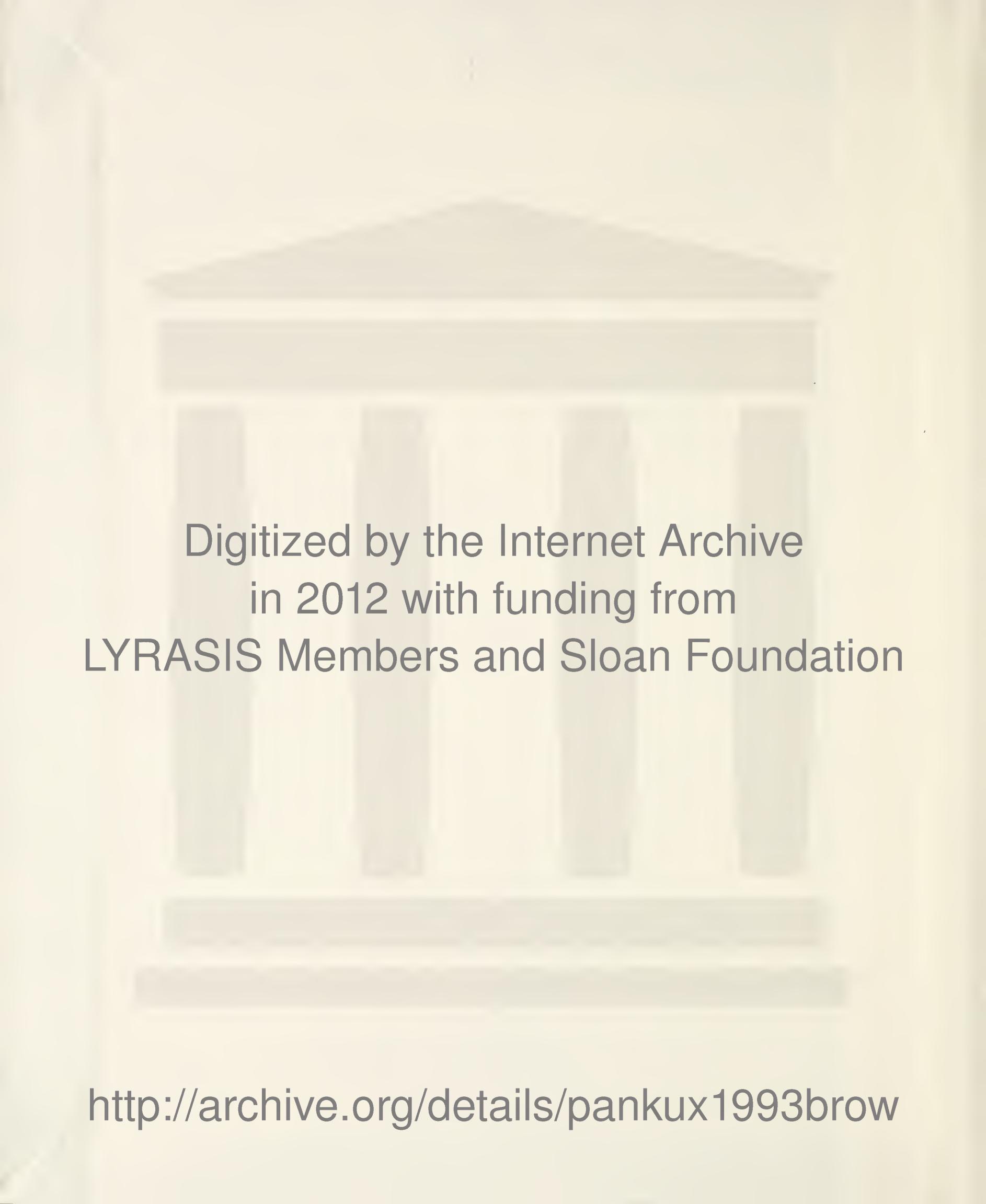


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P'an Ku

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Excerpts from the Series "Honey, I'm Home"
by
Patricia Beattie

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Editorial

I would like to take this opportunity as the new editor of P'an Ku to welcome you back to our publication. As usual, we had a time getting submissions for this issue but we had some stiff competition: the economy succumbed to entropy, Hurricane Andrew decimated South Florida, and the circus came to town under the guise of the Presidential election. One would think with all these disasters taking place that there would be an outpouring of literature and art as people look for some catharsis. Alas, such does not seem to be the case. I have pondered the lack of submissions for the past three issues and have yet to come to any conclusions concerning this dilemma. Is it possible that the populous have been so bombarded by media propaganda and useless information for so long that they have become numb? The extent to which we have become desensitized to our environment seems to have destroyed our emotions which are the lifeblood of the arts. In addition to this emotional wasteland, there seems to be a general lack of direction. Independent thought seems to have disappeared. Without explicit instruction, people seem unable to function. If this trend continues, what will we be left with?

Enough with these philosophical rantings. On with the magazine. I am pleased to report that P'an Ku won seven awards at the 1991-92 Florida Community College Press Association conference including first place in fiction and second place in overall general excellence. In addition, our magazine placed second nationally in the 1991-92 Community College Humanities Association. Not bad for a community college publication. Even with all the gremlins that plague us, we still manage to turn out a decent end product. In order to continue this tradition, we will need greater support from the literary and art communities of our college.

Enjoy our eclectic magazine.

Mark Jette'
Editor

Houses on Streetcorners

- Chris DeRosa -

houses on streetcorners
empty windows
tortured manhole covers
and running faucets
eyelids open/close
black rubber tire on pavement
third floor vacancies
and second floor apartments
clouded souls
and wet glass

tired flowers sleep in the wind
and the cold neighborhoods line the blocks
time stands in the doorway
next to the clock

geese fly in formation
like the winged creature from
Babylon

the telephone rings

Given Generation

- Carl W. Carruthers Jr. -

Distilled expressions exist without time.
A frosted facade to hide behind,
Like the beard of an old man.

Sound molded stone tossed upon
Crusts of common need.
No one here to see,
No one here to be.

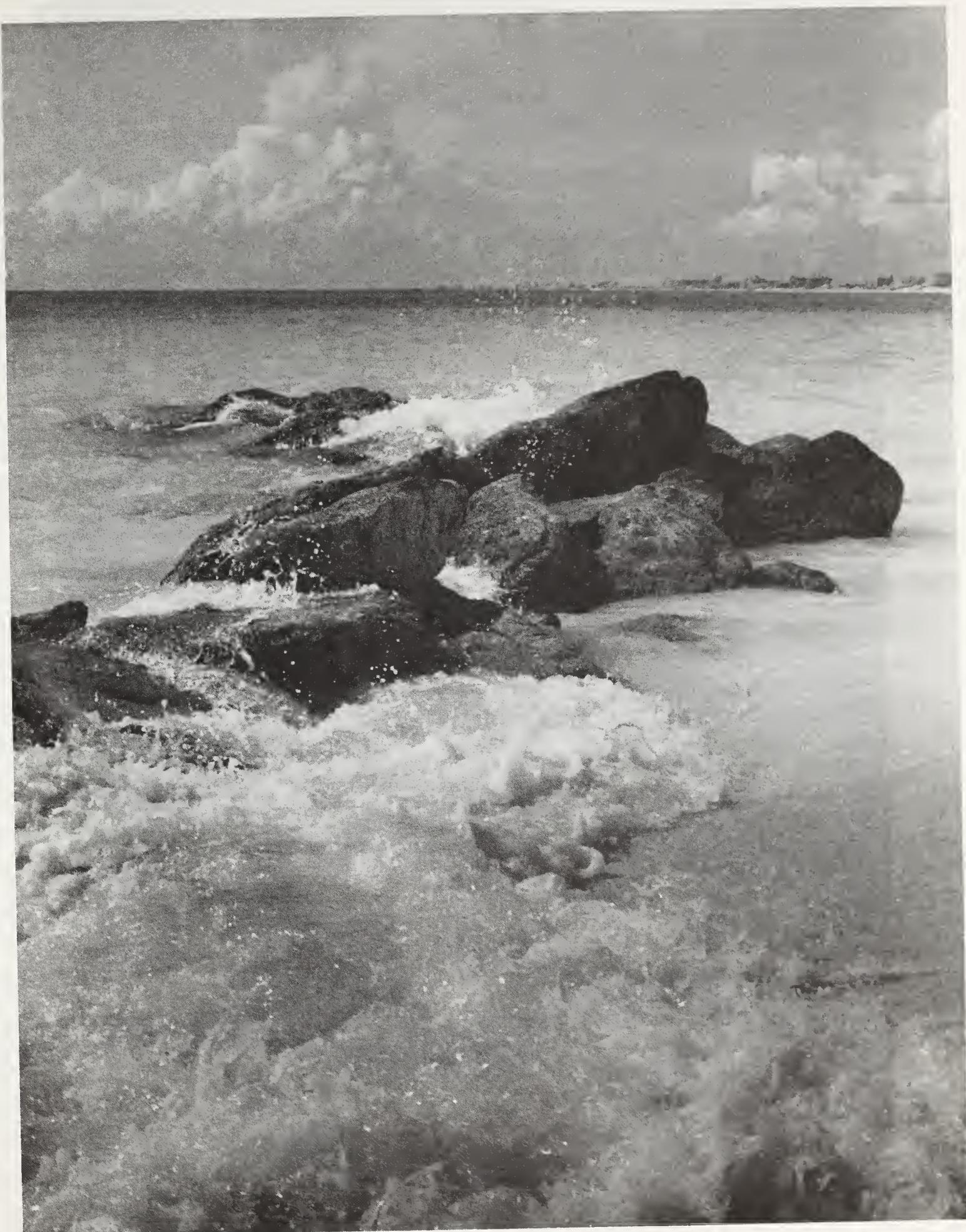
Throw out what is said,
Without thoughts to compare.
Fed from a hand, until
Cut off from creativity.

Stuffed to conform,
No one here to see,
No one here to be.

In My Mind

- Lance T. Metzger -

Wondering about
In my mind's endless caverns
I search for my unknown goal
Within my clouded dreams.
Wrecked within my hardened skull
is a ship that was lost
In the great storm of the seas.
Lightning, thunder and
hardened hail beat down
upon its bow until its hull
Was filled with holes and
It crashed upon the ripples
Of my thoughts.
There it lies buried deep
Beneath the surface of my
Ocean where I continually
Dive, again and again always
failing to reach it.



"Ocean Action" B&W Photograph by George Hockenberger



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Gigi Foland

Windows

- Donna Putnam -

A balmy breeze envelopes my face as I breathe deep to smell the rain that gently spatters outside my window. For some time I have observed the splendor of the changing seasons through this window. I've watched the scene transform from a snowy wonderland to a blossom of color. I've seen a sun-languished forest of green change to a magnificent array of trees that shed funnels of red and yellow leaves. Today the view is friendly, though it isn't always.

I've had many special windows in my life. I remember them all. As a child, the window of my bedroom was "my place." Late at night, alone in bed I would feel safe from the creatures of the dark, for out my window I could see the back of the old porch rocker gently glide back and forth under mother's weight. I knew that father was nearby, as the sweet smelling smoke from his pipe would sway through the air and dance over my bed. When I was sad, hurt, or simply confused, I would sit on the sill and soon feel as if a friend had uttered a kind word to my soul. The rolling meadows that were just beyond the barn were salve for tear stricken eyes. The trickling water from a nearby stream would sing soothing comfort for an aching heart. The sweet smell of Jasmine that surrounded our house could ward off any terrors that plagued a child's mind deep in the night. My window brought perspective and security to small thoughts in a big world. As time passed and moves were made, many windows fol-

lowed. Each view would invite my gaze when I needed refuge and solace.

This new window of mine is quite different.

In the beginning it cradled my soul like the others, but something has changed. When I watch the wind rage about and bend the trees, it can seem so angry out there. The leaves that blow every which way bring confusion instead of meaning. In the evening the dark sky can seem so cold and distant and the morning sun can feel like poison instead of salve for my tearful eyes.

My friend next door doesn't have a window. She comes over to stare out of mine from time to time. Although, it's not the same as having her own. My friend doesn't speak, but when she smiles I feel safe. I don't know how long that I've known her and I don't even know her name. It just feels as if we've been together forever. Oh, where are Claire and Bobby, my familiar friends? Where have they run off to? We used to go to the matinee on Saturday, then after the show we'd walk over to M&M's cafeteria. I would sit by the window to watch passersby. We'd laugh out loud at the high society women in their gay clothing as they scurried down the sidewalks in short jerky steps because their skirts were too tight.

Alone, on the way home, I'd take a window seat on the city bus and amuse myself with the downtown cultures which seemed to come alive in an exaggerated way on Saturday afternoons. I would absorb every inch of it: the large

busted Cuban women hanging laundry, with fat children clinging to their thighs; the pink and green houses that lined the bumpy streets with statues of Mary and Jesus set in weeds on front yards; skinny men with loose clothing and frozen faces sitting in front of outdoor cantinas, lazily waving flies from their food. The tempo didn't change much as we entered the negro neighborhoods, except there were children in diapers playing in the streets. The houses weren't as colorful as their Cuban neighbors, but the sad wrinkled faces of the men who sat on boxes and crates in front of the broken down stores remained the same. I was safe behind my window - tucked in on the bus. I could be as close as I wanted to a life I would never know. I could smell it. I could almost reach out and touch it, yet it could not touch me.

With the sweaty, dusty streets behind us, we would cross an imaginary line onto roads that were bordered with lush tropical foliage. The temperature would appear magically cooler than it had just two blocks before. It was such an obscene contrast that I often wondered if anyone else ever noticed; I think not. The stone mansions of the Grove would soon appear. They were set back on velvet lawns, subtly hidden by massive palms and wild hibiscus. They seemed to tease those who passed. I would crane my neck to sneak a glimpse of another life. I never saw anyone outside, nor any signs of life inside these homes. There was usually a shiny car in the drive, but never did I see the driver. There were no children outside playing, nor any other faces to link with this image. These were protected people. They were protected from the difficulties of life. Protected from life itself, I suppose. As I lurched and rocked with

the bus, I would smile and remember the day spent with my friends. Where were Claire and Bobby now?

I need to hear their laughter. I need to see their smiling faces. The faces around me now are strange. Most of their gazes seem so cold and angry, like I did something wrong. Some talk to me as if I can't hear them. At times they whisper and look at me oddly. They must think of me as a child or deaf; I'm surely neither. Though at times I feel like a child. Especially when the little girl with the nice eyes brings warm water to gently wash and massage my skin. I can't do that myself. I don't know why; I can't seem to remember. There's this young face that comes to see me every day or so. She knows me and almost looks like an old friend. She calls me mom. I can't figure her out, so I look out my window. It's too bad about her. If my voice hadn't left me, maybe I could try to explain, but what would I say? Perhaps one day she'll understand, or perhaps I will.

One day I just know that I'll look out my window and not be afraid. The faces will focus and I'll know who they are. I'll wake up and not feel the pain in my aching limbs. I'll get out of this bed and take a look around this place. One day my voice will return to my throat and I'll laugh out loud. I'll look in the mirror on my closet door and that woman who stares back will be young and gay instead of wrinkled and frightening.

My confused, young friend has come back. She looks so sad, with water running all down her nose. She brought some other faces with her. They hold her close and rub her back. I can't hear their voices clearly, and this room used to be much brighter. Someone must have drawn the shades.

I'm so tired; I'll just close my eyes for awhile.

"Mama, I want to come home now."

"All right," mama says. "C'mon honey." She takes me in her arms. It feels so nice. I can smell papa's pipe as I gently swing in that old rocker. The trailing scent of Jasmine and tobacco mixed with the sound of water lapping in the distance is almost too wonderful. Sitting here with my legs wrapped around mother's waist and my head buried in her neck, I hear someone call my name - ever so sweetly. It almost sounds like a song, a choir.

"I'm home now, Mama. I won't go away. I'm home now."

Sandra

- Jan Parker -

Bright
Beautiful
Promiscuous
Mensa member
Traveling in her own
milieu
My darling daughter.

A new man arrives
once again,
in her socially correct world.
She makes her list:

Angel hair pasta
crisp romaine
a provocative little wine.
Light the fire
Listen to music
Discuss and debate
How romantic!

Occasionally, she allows me
to enter her world.
Offering me tiny tastes
of her life.
I am always silent,
grateful for small scraps.
This time I am not silent.
I hope you have protection,
I said,
You know,

condoms.
The silence was so deep,
so dark.
All I could hear
was the pounding of my heart.
There is no need
she said
for people of our caliber.

In the blackest
most silent hours of the night
the nights of heavy sighing
my fears greet me
stay with me
until morning.

The Warrior

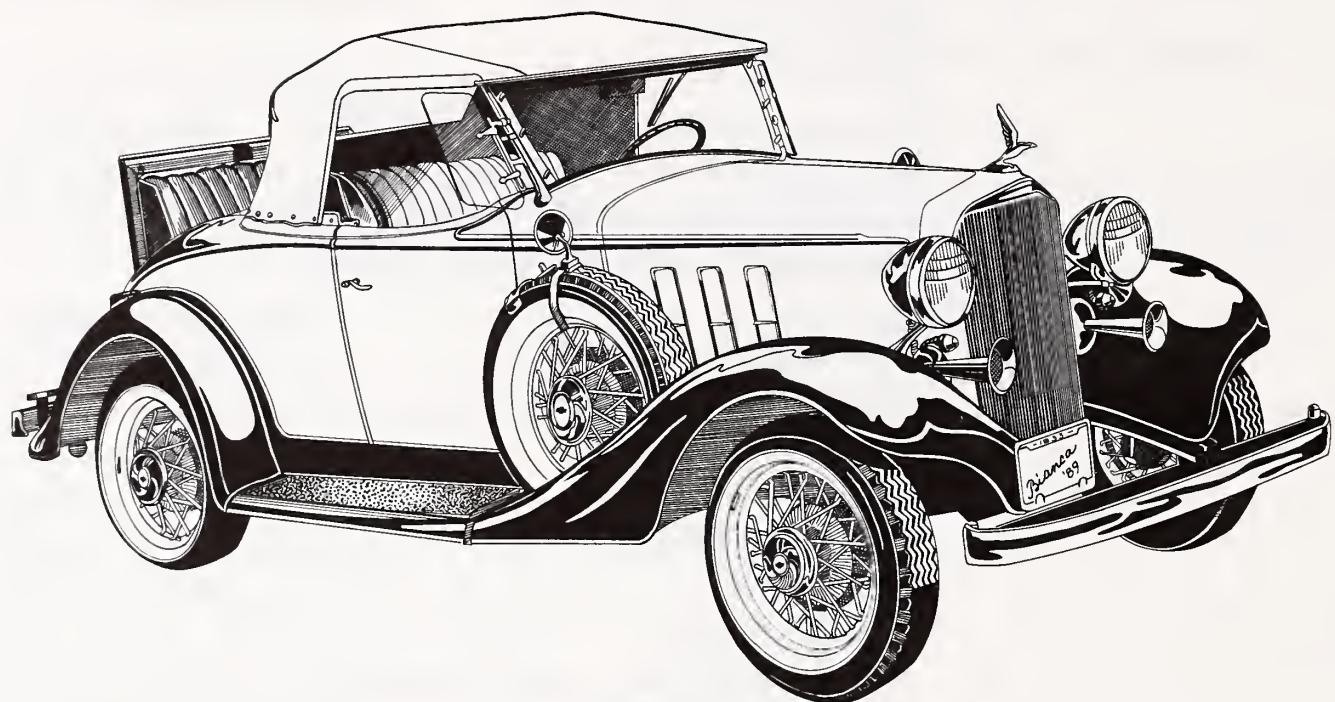
- Jan Parker -

She prepares her weapons
each morning:
Brooms, mops, dustpans-
She readies herself
for the big fight.

Her enemies are
huge dust balls
with sharp teeth and
musty smells.
Scattered sweaters
that have grown tiny little feet
during the dark night.
Clothes that scurry under beds
and other hard to reach places.

Door bells chiming
Phone bells ringing
Train whistles
Bus stops
Horns honking
Car pools
Computers
Music lessons
Onions, potatoes
More bells.

When night falls
she enters a new arena,
sleek and perfumed.
Waves of desire surround her
She raises her arms
in surrender.
Her passions wind around him
like a rope
Pulling him tighter, and
like a warrior
she shouts in victory.



"1933 Chevrolet" Rapid-0-Graph Ink Drawing by Bianca Barnett

Dream Republican

- Carl Anton -

A spouse, child and spaniel,
a mistress and a maid,
credit cards of gold,
and a house on a hill.
Dreams of a place without perversion.

No sin in the streets,
only behind closed doors.
A white flight field trip
to a poverty free paradise.
Dreams of a place
with people just like me.

Sugar-Free Sweet Daddy

- Soraya I. Georges -

Yo!

Yo, Baby!

Yo Baby Yo!

Look here, I'm your sweet
daddy Joe; I own that pretty
bright, red piece of cloth,
caressing your curves
so sweetly.

You're standing on my
curb — looks like I got myself
a lady — don't worry baby,
I'll fix that!

Don't *cut* your eyes at me!

I'm tall, dark, sweet and delicious
and I'm sugar-free!

I'm sweeter than that cheap candy
you got on Valentine's,
I'm pure satisfaction —
— no pain, no gain!

I'm a man with a plan.
Come on Baby, gimme all you got
and smile, Daddy will take *good*
care of you.

Now I own those pouty-plump-red kissers,
that 'do-if-you-dare' walk,
those long slender 'can't-be-caught' legs.
Oh yeah, that fine, semi-sweet dark
chocolate is dripping
all over...
Baby, that sugar's on you.

Dad

- Patricia DeNunzio -

Introspective
Resolute
Soft
The artist in him
shone through the many facets of his life.
Warm, gentle
Strong, mental
he had his inner strife.
A man of character
creative, stubborn, shy
But caring love,
always thinking....softly.
A poet-dreamer
sensitive, humble.
As vehicles of expression come to mind
music his kite, children his delight
I know him better now
Wish I could tell him.

The Egyptian Self

- Travis Clayton Wright -

A saber slashing freely at the page,
A feral staccato dance built of Conte' crayons,
inspiration in a mirror
of Titanium white, Mars black, Scarlet red.
The Phantom face stretched in minutes -
its life is frozen: a gray, paper continuum.
"Who...? Who are you?" — yet speechless it returns a stare.

Sinking away to shudders, muscles relax.
A remnant of firebirth, the portrait...complete.
Shell torn away from them both.
Flesh or fiber complements, preserves life in the other.
The Phantom is thrown to a chorus
voices whispered in a gallery —
crucified on tacks, set in place.
Visage released, it gazes away...



"Androgyny" Hand-Tinted B&W Photograph by Julian Samanieco

R.O.C.K. Camp

- Ben Klein -

When I was asked to be a counselor at a summer camp for a week, my initial reaction was disbelief. Why would anyone want me to be in charge of young, impressionable children for seven days and six nights? The more I thought about it, however, the more interesting and fun it sounded. I agreed to do it. As I look back upon that decision today, I kick myself every time I realize I almost passed up this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The camp is called R.O.C.K. Camp. It spells Reaching Out to Cancer Kids, a special American Cancer Society camp just for children and teenagers with cancer. It is currently located in Brandon, Florida, on a campground graciously donated by the community's Rotary Club. The camp was founded by a Florida Pediatric Oncologist in 1976 and has the distinction of being the first program of its kind in the United States. Every June, approximately 200 cancer patients, ages 6 to 18, attend one of the week-long sessions. This year, there were three sessions, and I decided to attend the first.

I drove up to camp for counselor orientation a day before the campers were scheduled to arrive. As I drove through the gates of my new home for one week, I kept thinking about all of the movies and TV shows I had seen pertaining to summer camp. This was my first time going away to summer camp as well as being a counselor, and all I kept thinking was, "I hope I get kids who listen to me and like me." I would

find out soon enough.

At orientation, we were given a counselor handbook filled with recommendations on how to help the kids deal with problems, such as homesickness. It also had helpful hints on what to do on rainy days, sleepless nights, and medical emergencies. I met my fellow counselors and instantly we all became friends. We shared stories about past experiences with kids or camp and told everyone how we got involved with R.O.C.K. Camp. It seemed most of the counselors were affected by cancer in some way, either personally or by a relative. We all shared a special bond that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

As the day went on, we learned more about making the kids feel comfortable and welcome. We even learned how to play a few games which teach the kids how to break the ice with each other. Finally, night came and we all retired to our cabins.

The next day we received our cabin assignments which included the names of the kids that would be in my cabin. George, my co-counselor, and I had seven boys between the ages of six and eight. As we met our boys, we knew instantly that the following week was going to be one of the best in our lives.

Each one of our kids had something about him that made him special. It wasn't the fact that each one of them had or has cancer, but something deeper than that. It had something to do with the fact that each of these kids were

forced to grow up very fast. They were thrown into a new world consisting of doctors, nurses, needles, and medicine. Their positive attitudes did not let anything stop them from achieving their goal. Whether we were playing baseball or basketball or just hanging out singing songs, they showed their fighting spirit by giving it their all. Although they all had different personalities, they shared a similar bond which was evident when it came time for them to work together. The camp has a philosophy that it had followed since its opening in 1976: R.O.C.K. Camp is for having fun, learning new things, growing, and developing. The purpose is to provide campers with an opportunity to do these things, while emphasizing how normal a child with cancer is. As counselors, we were to provide understanding, leadership, and direction...and to enjoy our experiences with campers.

As with anything else, we had our problems too. It amazed me how little these kids cared for personal hygiene. Getting them to brush their teeth was next to impossible! It was even harder to get them to take a shower. Finally, after threatening and pleading with them, I gave up and let them go without showering and brushing their teeth. I figured they were on vacation and deserved to do what made them happy. If having bad breath and body odor made them happy, then I wasn't the one who was going to stand in their way!

The camp offered many activities to keep the kids busy. They could choose between horseback riding, boating, swimming, fishing, singing, drama, and art. I was one of the counselors in charge of the fishing activity. We all sat along a wooden dock that jutted out over the

lake. I didn't know the first thing about fishing and had the kids who knew how to fish teach me. Our bamboo poles were obviously not meant for heavy duty fishing and could only support the weight of a small fish. But as luck would have it, the only creatures caught were a group of hungry turtles. The turtles loved it and kept coming back for more food. As for the kids, none of them was disappointed that we caught no fish. The playful turtles made up for it!

It was not uncommon to hear the voice of Don, our music director, coming from inside the rec room. This was definitely the highlight of the day. We all congregated in this room and sat on the floor singing:

I'm going to R.O.C.K. Camp and
I'm gonna get a smile,
I'm going to R.O.C.K. Camp and
I'm gonna get a smile,
Gonna get a R.O.C.K. Camp smile!!

The week flew by and I was sorry to see Saturday come so quickly. Camp wasn't like anything I had ever experienced before and it created many wonderful memories for me. I had no idea that camp was so much fun, especially the one I attended. It is not the place where the camp is located, or even the run-down cabins that were our living facilities, but the special kids and caring counselors that make the whole experience worthwhile.

As the kids were loading onto the bus, emotions flowed uncontrollably. Counselors and campers alike became very close during the week and it was hard to say good-bye. As I helped my kids on the bus, I glanced over to one of my kids who had a behavioral problem throughout the week. He was crying.

He told me he was sad because he was going to miss me and the rest of camp. Seeing this "problem child" (as we so cleverly nicknamed him) crying really had an effect on me. I suddenly realized that we did get through to these kids and had made a lasting impact on them. That had to be the biggest thrill I have ever experienced.

When I think of a place in the world that is very special to me, R.O.C.K. Camp is the first place that pops into mind. One counselor told me as I was getting ready to go home, "One of the essential beauties of camp is that no matter how many summers we return, we always leave with new insights, friends, and renewed spirit."

Untitled

- Lisa Dycie -

Your feathers are still wet
And your body still warm
As if you exited a womb.
Your child's eyes
Soft brown
Also wet
See me both with wisdom
and innocence.
You ask me the questions
The meaning of life
And death, as you stand among the ashes
Still wisps of smoke rising around you
And from you.
My love will not answer your questions
And yours, not mine.
Only the phoenix knows
In those last few moments
As its body alights in flames
Why the world ends
And then begins again.



"Empty Space" B&W Photograph by Marilyn Kluger

Untitled

- Joan Sherrod-Benes -

Close your eyes and see the
darkness
It surrounds you - taking you
in like a starving beast
You cannot run from it
you turn only to find a
deeper darkness
It beckons you to stay and let
it become a part of you
To let it fill your senses
to give you eternal peace
Yet it only wants you to have
eternal pain
It wants you to suffer the way
you had wished it would
never be
It confuses you - it is coy
yet cold
Full of love yet it loves
to hate
It takes in some of the finest
some of the fiercest
And all it wants is your
soul to rot in hell
It is too late for you to turn
back
It is deep within you
stealing your life
You can feel it draining your
emotions - your memories
your soul
All you have left is the
memory of that moment
The pulling of the trigger
the warmth of the steel
The overwhelming sense of intense
pain for the one split second
then total numbness-
emptiness
The darkness was there way
before the ending of your
life
Now that is all you have.

She Lays in the Grass

- Shane Bushman -

She lays in the grass
Silently resting her tired form
Danger is not evident
Innocence lingers before her

Approach her without caution
Sharing a moment with her beauty
Her eyes are sirens
Calling to your inside

Stroke her
Let her warmth flow through your veins
And fill your emptiness with passion
But do not show her you are afraid

If she senses fear she will attack
Cutting into your chest
And ripping into your heart
Watch helplessly as your blood stains
Her shiny coat and white teeth

She licks her paws clean
Leaving her prey to quietly fade
Your weak soul unable to
Fulfill the desire to follow her

Savor her memory
The smell of her presence
But do not dwell
In time another will find you
And lick the wound clean
Restoring your faith
And capturing your heart

Untitled

- Debbie Hoodiman -

One day the past went away
and left me deserted
I could no longer see
Yesterday

and tomorrow
is always invisible
so all I had was today
and I was a daisy
lost
in a field of
violets and
roses and
daffodils
with nothing to
look back on
nothing to look forward to.
So I had to turn
my head
toward myself
and find
me.



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Nancy E. Anderson

The Character

- Joy Duffy -

A lone male leaned on the bar. He was drunk. My watch said 10 a.m. Interesting.

Approximately halfway through the mystery book I was writing, I realized my writing had stalled. My bar characters didn't seem real. Never having frequented a bar, I didn't know how a bar scene should be laid out or how drinking people should act. So there I sat, doing a character study of drunks.

I had just put the Virgin Bloody Mary to my lips, when the gunman walked in. "Give me a drink, before I blow your pants off," he yelled.

The bartender stopped looking bored long enough to say, "Cody, will you stop? This here lady ain't never been here before, you'll scare the piss out of her."

"Pardon me, ma'am," the gunman said. He bowed at the waist and tipped his hat. "I didn't mean to scare nobody." He climbed on the stool to my right, laid his gun and frayed stetson on the bar, and turned his frazzled white head toward me. "Howdy, ma'am, I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Cody, Wild Bill that is."

"You ain't shit," the bartender said to Cody. Then he turned his red bloated face toward me. "Fancies his self as an actor, he does. Just ignore the little runt."

"You offend my sensitivities, young man." The little man picked up the gun and waved it at the bartender. "A little respect please. This here young lady might be the talent scout I been

expecting."

"Cody, the only talent you got is in your feet and if they was so talented they'd be carrying you straight to hell, on account of I ain't serving you less you got some dough."

Cody turned his pockets inside out. He looked at them hanging there like he was surprised. "I must of been robbed!"

"You ain't been robbed, you ain't never brought no money in here in the first place."

"Did too."

"Did not. Now get out of here."

I looked from one to the other. Both were glaring, neither would look away from the other's face. I broke the silence by saying, "Let me buy this gentleman a drink."

"But ma'am, this guy's just a moocher."

Cody stood on the rung of the stool and leaned across the bar, his pale hands gripping the bar rail. With his wrinkled face set in a frown he said, "Am not."

"Are so." The bartender leaned closer.

"Am not."

"Am too."

"Gentlemen, please, if you didn't mind."

The bartender snapped to attention. "Yes?"

"Give the gentleman a drink. Please."

Begrudgingly the bartender poured a shot of bourbon into a glass.

He slammed it on the bar so hard that the amber liquid splashed across the wooden surface. "So sorry," he said sarcastically.

The little would-be actor settled back on the stool, breathed a sigh, lifted the small glass, and tossed the shot into his mouth. He gasped, pounded his chest with a fist, gasped again and said, "Great stuff," a brilliant smile lighting his crimped face.

Cody slid his short legs off the stool, wobbled for a second, grabbed the bar to steady himself and said, "Best be on my way, nice meeting you, ma'am." He started walking toward the door.

"Wait a second!" I shouted.

"Sorry, forgot my manners." He bowed. "Thank you, ma'am. Thank you very kindly."

"Where...where are you going?"

"The show must go on," he said and bowed again almost doubling in half. "Thank you kindly." He turned and walked away, his small, frail frame swaying slightly. The gun went with him, dangling loosely in his left hand.

I looked at the smiling bartender, who said, "He's the damnedest thing I ever saw. Ninety if he's a day and still carries on this routing every day, as if he were a kid. I guess it's what the old man lives for."

"What are you talking about."

"The old man. I can't quite figure it out. Either he thinks he's Buffalo Bill Cody and he's robbing the saloon, or an actor playing a part, or else he's a really good con artist."

"Why do you say that? He seems like any lonely old man with no money, just trying to get a drink."

"He gets someone to buy him a drink every day with this act of his," the bartender said.

"Well, I think it's great. He's obviously poor, but at least he's ingenious enough to pull this act to get a few drinks. It's refreshing to see such incentive. He gets his drink and he gets to meet new people. He's not sitting around feeling sorry for himself like some old people do. I like him. I like the idea of him not letting his financial situation get the best of him."

"He's a character all right. Who'd believe it?"

"What?"

"He's the richest man in town." I knew I'd found the character for my story.

Loneliness

- Barbara Glenn -

The uncertain morning hours.
Stale odors from last night, last month.
Unsettled thoughts fill every available corner.
Decisions.
Revisions.

My eyes flicker open.
I can still visualize those haunting figures
they call dreams, on the ceiling.
Narrow beams of light creep through the shutters.
I sit cross-legged on the edge of my bed and peer out.

Bits of colorless glass and crushed tobacco
are on display in the gutters.
Peeling paint and brittle shrubs
line the streets.
Stillness.
Silence.

I will shut my door on you, world.
You only consist of empty lots and broken dreams.
I have my own vacancies.
I do not want to know yours.
I do not need to.
Not at present, anyway.
I go back to the challenge of uncertainty.
My reality.

The Desert

- Chris DeRosa -

the desert
meadowlands
girls in wooded boundaries
gone
run
farewell
see you next
year

no, that wasn't clear
to my mind
over matter
trouble around
the bend
fast, get in the car
don't look
it's only life looking over
your shoulder
I can't remember
was that fun?

leaves on the trees
sweet song and honey bees
sand blowing in the wind
fire breathes fire
and wind breathes air
that wasn't fair
I didn't say you could
watch

what's the time
it's late
the leaves are falling
blowing in the wind
it's still not clear



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Diana June Bonnett

God Bless America

- Norma Soulet -

Land of the free,
Or so it was.
My words, my art, my
actions are censored.
Slaves were freed,
but prejudice sits still.
Blacks, Jews, Hispanics,
Asians; we come and go,
but still we are victims
of racist crimes.
The Bill of Rights was once
on our side, and now we
get raped by the one we
trusted.

Babies having babies,
babies killing babies.
Protection from our president,

“My fellow Americans, today
we have declared war on.....”

Young men marching from the
trenches of hell.
BOOM! You are dead,
I just thought it was a game.
My neighbors living on the
streets.....

Freedom of Speech
Freedom of Religion
Freedom of Press

God Bless America,
Land of the free.

Mistaken Comfort

- Nicola Waldron -

She gave me a white shirt
I tore it apart and burned it
Mama wouldn't know
She was never home

She gave me white socks
I sold them to John next door
Mama found out
and for hours
Refused to close her mouth

When she gave me white shoes
I wanted to run
But Mama's stare was like a sharp knife
glistening in the sun
ready to circumsize any attitudes unlike her son
I tried them on.

My joy was unspeakable
They did not fit
The giver's blue eyes looked down-
She sighed.
Mama thanked her and went back to work
at the sink, in the rooms, on the floor.

The next day she gave me brown shoes
I kept them.



"Wolf Robe, Cheyenne" Gouache by Bianca Barnett

Memoirs of a Dying Lady

- Glenda A. Budniza -

Hospital for the Mentally Disturbed
Plains, North Dakota
Origin: Cheyenne Tribe
(excerpt from diary)...

My beloved na-ehame
how long has it truly been?
Oh, how the suns and moons have
travelled across my western sky.
The seasons too, have changed in unison;
And still no word.
Many times have i Dreamed
some where beneath, in the
quiet mist and shadows it has
been your reflection and your smile
and your warmth
that i've reached out to capture.

In the most intimate places of my
heart 'doth my soul remember
...ahh, yes memories
the Great Plains
the vibrant thunder of the buffalo
and the respected cry of the eagle
We ate and slept upon the splendor of Grandmother Earth---
oh so careful to give back what we took.

Yet do you remember my nightmares of
the coming of the ve-hoe-e?
How I prayed and sang to the Great Maheo...

...ahh, yes memories
a tender tap on my shoulder
and then "hello"
Smiles with butterflies!

Oh how the butterflies flew and danced against our horizon;
do you still remember my darling?

(a time before the coming of many ve-hoe-e and the black monster blowing
smoke, the fire water, as too the diseases?)

Our time was filled with the purity of our People
As we shared eloquent words of true love
while in the background melodies soared against the breeze.

Running, yes at times we ran and fought and tried to
survive from the hour which kept us prisoner to what
reality would soon be,
this often treacherous truth.

Yet, ohh, how we loved so passionately
each touch forever etched upon my innocent skin—
your very scent never to be forgotten.

Am I being silly? Why must reality be so cruel?
No, not cruel for who are we to judge?
Only the Great Maheo will guide us...

Ours was a simple moment lost in time
 Held in the innocence that we believed to be true
 an undying love. Ai.

Suddenly, the sky I think, has lost its bluest hue;
 My Soul chooses to no longer dance
 It simply sits quitly near Imagination and
 once in a while they speak to Memory and reminisce...
 THE DRUMS ARE BEATING LOUDLY

Quickly! now, Run!
 faster, faster, ohh darling the ballad is ending
 beyond us the moon is taking position—
 Maybe our time is truly ending
 and the memories begin to fade===
 No! No! My Na-ehame, remember me love...

the Circle will Never break
 nor the Buffalo from grazing
 not even the Wolves from Howling
 let it be known,it shall be the
 TRUTH ALONE THAT WILL SET US FREE

Not time nor reality will ever truly catch us will they?

Closing my eyelids, in my last breath
 it is your name which remains upon
 my lips...

Ne- mehotatse, Wind in His Hair, Na-ehame

!R E J O I C E !

MAHA-NEMENE-O-O

(THEY ARE ALL SINGING)



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Scott Blumenthol

Batting Zero

- Jack Mack -

Kevin wearily opened his eyes. What, in a dream, had been a hammer banging on an anvil was now water dripping from a faucet in the pantry. "Ma," Kevin yelled, "turn off the faucet!"

"What, Kevin?" Mrs. Clover asked.

"Turn off the water!"

"Water's not dripping, Kevin. Besides, it's time to get up for work."

"Ma, I told you before..." He gave up. Ma couldn't seem to remember that he had been fired a month ago. He was wide awake now; he might as well get out of bed.

Kevin threw the covers off. The bedroom was cold, and his muscles ached from yesterday's sandlot baseball game with Angie and the guys.

In high school, only his love of baseball had kept Kevin from dropping out. In fact, sports and cars were about the only things he had studied during those four years. And this morning, the warm shine of one of his trophies reminded him of better times as he quickly pulled his jeans onto his slender body. On the way to the kitchen, Kevin turned the dripping faucet off.

In the tiny kitchen, Anna Clover was making toast and coffee. "You want breakfast, Kevin?" she asked in anticipation.

Kevin sat down at the table and stared out the only window in the room.

"Well?" asked Anna as she set her coffee down.

"Just coffee, Ma," murmured

Kevin. To a nineteen year old, Ma seemed as old as a dinosaur. And, with her bad hearing, she drove him crazy sometimes, especially with that dripping faucet!

Anna poured Kevin's coffee and sat down. "Kevin, I've got a date tonight with my new boyfriend. I might be home late."

"Great, Ma," Kevin said, not even pretending to care. "BOY-friend," he thought. How could she call some old geezer her boyfriend? The guy has to be even older than she is! He hoped, though, that his mother would meet someone. He was anxious to move out, but hated the thought of leaving her alone.

"Great, Ma," Kevin smirked. "Maybe you two will run off and get married tonight."

Anna sat with her coffee and then whipped back, "Kevin, maybe marrying someone after five dates is something that you'd do, but not me. Phil and I are doing just fine. In fact, you know I've been wanting you to meet Phil."

"Ma, you're not even dating. You just go over to his shop and talk, and then he walks you home."

Anna said nothing. She knew her generation dated differently, and what she and Phil did was none of Kevin's business. Anna dreamed of her new boyfriend and smiled.

"Tonight is special. I'm meeting Phil after he's done work and we're having nice sandwiches." Anna knew that she and Phil were progressing at just the right pace.

"Finish your coffee, Kevin. You'll

be late for work."

"Ma, I told you a hundred times. I don't have any work." He ended the sentence as a card player throws away a bad hand. Whatever he told Ma today, he would have to tell her tomorrow.

"Ma," Kevin continued, changing his tone from anger to sheepishness, "could you lend me fifteen dollars?"

"For what?" Anna asked, knowing she would say no.

"Angie and I want to go to that car show tomorrow." Kevin was asking like a seven-year-old begs for candy. Maybe pleading like this would get a yes.

"Kevin, go out and work. You know we got no money. If you got nothing to do all day, go work. I don't have no extra money!"

Kevin knew it was hopeless to ask again. "I'm going out, Ma," he said, getting up from the table. "Don't know what time I'll be home."

"Put on your heavy jacket, Kevin. It's cold outside."

As Kevin went out the door, Anna yelled after him that there would be no supper tonight, that she had a date with Phil, that she might be home late. It was as if they had not been talking over breakfast only five minutes earlier.

* * *

Outside, the cold air woke Kevin up as he walked. "This is too cold for October," he thought as he buried his hands in the warm pockets of his fleece-lined denim jacket.

Out of work again, Kevin had no place to go. He had never liked work; his last job was unloading machine parts from trucks. Now, a month after being fired for drunkenness, the only money

he had was the few bucks he could win shooting pool.

"Timing," Kevin thought. "Bad timing, that's all it was." His whole life, like the day he was fired, had been nothing but bad timing. "Timing. That's the problem. I have a few drinks. The boss shows up. Timing."

As Kevin walked, his aching muscles reminded him of yesterday's game. Angie had slid into him at first base. Sometimes, Angie was more trouble than he was worth. If he wasn't crashing into Kevin, he was out scheming for an easy buck.

This morning, the aching and the cold told Kevin to head for the warm gas station. At least the guys and the fat dog would be there.

He walked across the green steel bridge. The sound of the cars driving on the grating made a jagged, buzzing sound inside his head.

"Is the dog dead yet?" Kevin asked as he let the gas station door slam shut behind him. Mitch looked over from the scratched maple desk where he was reading the paper, gave a wave, and said nothing. The old dog staggered to his feet and ambled over to Kevin for a scratch on the back.

"Good dog, Duke. Know any tricks?" Kevin teased as he rubbed the fat dog's back. The old stray looked up and said nothing, but only leaned harder against Kevin's leg. Duke showed up most mornings and would leave when the attention stopped.

Kevin sat down on a dusty old chair that had half the stuffing beat out of it. The chair, the stray dog, the desk. It was typical gas station decor of the late 60's.

"Hey, Kev, Angie was in," Mitch spoke, half looking at Kevin and half at

the dog. "He wants to see you. He might stop back."

Kevin kept patting Duke's head. The dog was as dusty as the chair. "Yeah," Kevin muttered, picking up an old car magazine. Mitch looked back down at the newspaper unfolded on the desk.

Angie had been Kevin's best friend since high school, even though he wasn't too bright. He had been thrown out of school for his antisocial behavior, but he was still a great guy to shoot pool or down a few beers with.

A warm gas station office is a nice place to be on a cold, drizzly day; you don't have to talk much to feel comfortable. By noontime, however, Kevin realized that he had been talking more to the dog than to Mitch. Mitch looked up at the sound of a car driving in. It was Angie.

Angie often tried to get Kevin involved in one scam or another. He always needed money, and it hadn't surprised Kevin when Angie asked him to get the money for the car show from his mother.

"She said no, Angie. I didn't get the bucks." The disappointment in his voice let Angie know right away that Kevin was talking about the show. "Guess we miss it."

If Angie wasn't always playing the tough guy, he might've cried then and there.

"I'm going. I don't care. I'm not missing this one." Angie was ranting. He loved cars, and he was tired of not having money. "I'm going, and you're going with me."

"What are you talking, Angie? We got no money." Kevin sat there, puzzled.

"We rob the money. I don't care.

There's a laundry over on Broadway. The owner doesn't know us. Krayler's Laundry. I've been thinking about doing this for a real long time." Kevin could hear the desperation in Angie's voice.

"We go in right before closing with a bag of laundry," Angie continued, forming his plan as he talked. "We put the bag on the counter, pull out a bat, and tell him 'Put the money in the bag, old man.' Then we take the bag and go. I'm not missing out on that car show or anything else!"

Kevin couldn't imagine that Angie believed this could work, but he could tell that Angie had thought it up all by himself.

"Angie, we show that old man a bat, and he laughs at us. Then what?" Kevin snickered, trying to shoot holes into Angie's scheme.

"Easy. We leave."

"What?"

"We leave. No one gets hurt."

Kevin hadn't expected such an answer. It sounded too sensible, especially from Angie. "Not bad," he thought. Kevin didn't like getting rough, but this was no knives, no guns. And if Krayler laughs, so what? We leave and nothing gets hurt but our pride.

"Not half bad, Angie." The idea was sounding better as Angie rambled on.

"Look, Kev, right now only us two know about this. That's why it's so good. We do it now. Tonight."

Angie pushed Kevin. "Come on, buddy. The show's tomorrow. We do it tonight. Come on, just once. Tonight."

* * *

The laundry bag looked dumb,

Kevin thought, as he and Angie stood in the cold across the street from Krayler's Laundry. "We should've put a few shirts in the bag," he mused. "Just a laundry bag with a bat looks real dumb."

At ten minutes of eight, there was little traffic. Besides Krayler's, only the diner, a few stores down, was still open.

"Angie, my hands are freezin'. We got time. Let's get a coffee."

"Are you stupid or what?" Angie asked incredulously. "We don't need anyone seeing us around here tonight. Just shut up and wait."

At three before eight, Angie finally felt ready. The two crossed the street and carried the laundry bag into the shop. Krayler turned from his register and looked up. "Typical," he thought. "Another last-minute customer."

"Good evening," Krayler sang. "a drop-off?"

Angie set the bag on the counter. Kevin reached in and grabbed the handle of the bat, leaving it in the bag.

"Yeah," Angie smiled. "A drop-off. Except you're dropping your cash in here." Krayler froze for a moment, then looked up. He didn't seem to understand. Kevin was already nervous.

"In here, old man," Kevin said in a voice that sounded not like his own. "The cash. In the bag!"

The old man opened the register; the earth-shattering sound made Kevin jump. Angie tapped his shoulder. "Kev," Angie whispered, "I heard something from out back! I'm sure!"

"Old man," Kevin snapped, "who's back there? The money. Now!" Kevin yanked the bat from the bag. The old man froze again.

Another noise from the back. Kevin pounded the counter with the bat.

"Money, now!" The old man didn't move. In a panic, Kevin grabbed the bat hard and swung it at Krayler.

The sound of the bat's striking Krayler was like the noise a tree makes when it falls to the ground. The slow-motion crackling of bones seemed to reverberate forever in Kevin's head. Krayler made no moans as he dropped to the floor behind the counter.

Kevin stood in silence while Angie reached into the cash drawer. When another sound from the back reminded them that they had to get out of there, Kevin flung the bat behind the counter as they ran out.

* * *

The waitress at the diner liked Anna; she always put a little extra on the sandwiches when she knew Anna would be dining with her boyfriend Phil. This evening, though, Anna had brought coffee from home. Anna hated to pay so much for coffee at the diner, but hot coffee would warm Phil up before the cold walk home.

Anna came into the store's back room through an unlocked alley door. While she set the sandwiches and coffee on a tray, she could hear Phil closing up the store.

Although she walked with a wobble, Anna thought a tray made things seem so much nicer. Anna carried the tray towards the front counter. When she got near the windows, she spotted two blurs running in the darkness outside.

"My goodness," she thought, "that one looks familiar. But who? Neighborhood boys?" Anna began to worry as she looked around and didn't see Phil. She ambled up to the counter

and set the tray down on it.

The checkered shirt on the floor caught Anna. "Oh my God! No! Phil! Oh God, NO!" she screamed as she realized what had happened.

Anna dashed around the counter and cradled Phil. "Why my Phil? Why you?" she wailed. Those boys. That boy! Now she knew him. "Angie!!" she yelled to no one.

Anna held Phil. Tears streamed from her eyes. She was old; she was shaking and didn't know what to do. Through her tears she looked up and around. The bat. Too out of place in a laundry. She lunged for it and picked it up. Slowly, the letters that were carved on the bat burned into her heart as she read: "KEVIN C."

Anna dropped the bat. The two boys raced through her head. The boys. The bat. The jacket! "Kevin!!!"

* * *

Kevin wearily opened his eyes. What, in a dream, had been water dripping from a faucet in the pantry was now a tin cup banging on a cell bar. "Ma," Kevin yelled, "turn off the faucet!"

"Water's not dripping, Kevin. Water's not dripping," replied the animal in the next cage.

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"Eric's World" B&W Photograph by Pat Taback

Exile from My Soul

- Suchitra Banerji -

Hold my presence in yours, and
do not forget the moments when we sorted out-
the grains of sand from our eyes
that never cleared in ceaseless wandering.

Unfold those skies;
squeeze the blood out of the clouds!
And carefully, capture these yellow shadows
spreading over the 'saguaro' of my dreams...

Please do something
about those unseen wolves
bending over the corpses, left as prey!

My orb is an emerald, but
in the deserts of exile
(I am in exile from my soul)
-Spring after Spring!
-Autumn after Autumn

What happened to the love?
Why can't I see its foot prints any more?

A Glass of Water, with Cockroach

- Kwan Lowe -

In the hour of the madness she is walking, dreaming, singing her soft lullaby to the waves that cannot hear. She touches no earth, nor sand, nor rock beneath her feet, floating instead on the wisps of the fever dream that she lives within, wandering through the storm like an acrobat far, far above the slackjawed spectators, balanced on strands between the desire and the death as the ocean roars welcome to the void.

She was...she was...like no other she was the desire and the attraction. Midnight, in the season of rains, she flees from me with tears of a sort that having been, could never be again. She alone, so alone, and none there to comfort her. So secure in her madness, untoouchable, the dark-haired angel of a lost desire.

Could you understand if I told you? There are times since that impossible day and that impossible night when I have courted death with hideous longing, for every waking moment seems like a dream, a fever dream infinitely different from the spectral quality of that first night.

What's my point, you say? Why go on about a dream or a delusion or a madness? Well, I have no other stories to tell, none that would or could matter in any way, so I tell hers. Others have stories of war, or hunger, or suffering, or the naked truth that confronts the dying man on his deathbed. Others have sipped coffee on a sunny Paris boulevard or slogged through the dirty green waters of a South American jungle. Others, even, have glimpsed with startled eyes the naked oppression on the streets of the American metropolis and written of their distaste. But I can do none of these

things. I have lived in soporific cities and fed my mind on the bland pabulum of sitcom, soap opera, nature specials and docu-dramas and I can no longer fake outrage the way the whores on Biscayne fake orgasms.

I work, and have worked at the same place for such an eternity that every cobweb, every crack, every loose nail is permanently branded into my memory. This scares me in a way that is only mine to understand. The work is monotonous, as is everything connected with the factory or warehouse. Every day I approach the time clock with a latent dread, a tightening of the stomach and a quickening of the pulse. After a day of mind-numbing boredom I punch out with the knowledge that I have somehow parcellled out a piece of my soul to stoke a hideous and nameless machine, I could make comparisons between the warehouses and the whorehouses that shared the same dusty stretch of highway, and long ago someone already had. More worthy essayists and poets have told of the quiet desperation that plagues the manual laborer. I cannot claim to know it, having never experienced their particular oppressions, but I do know that I feel trapped within an impossible system that does not allow for a quiet moment of contentment. Do I make rank obeisance to the money god? Hardly. I exist from week to week, not living but surviving.

So did she, but it never crossed her mind to complain. She worked in a supermarket on State Road 7 and though the building was clean, air-conditioned, and much more sanitary than the dusty warehouses, she too felt the hot breathed specter of need behind her. Her pay-

checks, like mine, went to pay rent or buy food or fix her car. No, she never knew involuntary hunger, and never knew what it felt like to spend a night in a shelter or under a bridge as the more unfortunate have. In that larger picture she was not that badly off.

Yet, every week she walked to Roger's Supermarket with five dollars in her pocket to buy a chance at the American dream. Five dollars was no great amount to her. If Lotto did not exist it would have gone to buy a hamburger at the Burger King down the road. Five dollars was all that she spent every week. Every few months the outraged columnists in the Herald or Sentinel would tell how one had a much better chance of winning at the track or getting hit by lightning. Lotto was just an opium for the hopeless, a mocking substitute for the hope/faith/heaven nonsense. It would be much better to invest the money in a savings account, or for God's sake, buy something else more worthwhile. She read the articles and knew their factual truth, and if one asked her to rationalize her weekly spending she would have been unable to.

One night I walked into Roger's Market and saw her standing in line with her five dollars and Lotto slips in hand. I smiled at her and she smiled back and that was it. A week later and the same script was repeated. A week after that and again the same thing. Somehow, I cannot even remember the exact day or the manner, I introduced myself and learned her name, that she worked at the supermarket on the highway, that she arrived in Florida three years ago from Guyana, that she was planning to go to school as soon as she was able. For weeks afterward I visited her at her work and sent her flowers, cards, and little gifts that I hoped would pull her beyond the brighter side of friendship. I painted her picture, dedi-

cated poems to her, and smothered her in an unwanted attention. And it worked.

If I was in the mood I could say that we shared common interests, understood each other, and felt the strong hand of destiny had somehow united us, but I would be guilty of a lie. She had journeyed beyond the cynicism of old age and had never bothered with the fashionable boredom that insulated youth from despair.

She had a story she would have told if outrage at her situation had forced it or twenty centuries of stone-faced, stoic acceptance of her lot had allowed it. The words, however, never came—maybe she lacked them or did not realize that anyone listened. If you told her stories of quiet places in the industrial cities she would smile and take on that misty eyed look that spoke of the inexplicable mix of hopes, fears, and dreams that were too long denied and left to simmer on a back burner in some dark oblivion. She felt though, more than myself I think, that the icy darkness was growing closer about her. She sensed the desperation every time she handed over her five dollars at the Lotto counter, wrote a check for the rent, or stole a little from her college savings. Even as she lost herself in the movies or the sweet, stupid little ballads seeping incessantly from her radio, she knew that it was all a lie.

Then last month or last year—it does not matter anymore—I stole from her the delusion that had kept her afloat. That day we had spent at the beach watching the pale tourists splash around in the surf. We left, walked around and looked at the over-priced tourist merchandise, and returned later when everyone had disappeared.

Midnight neared as we again found ourselves on the beach. I suppose that it was perfect, the stuff of which the poets sang. There were no clouds, mists,

or haze to shroud the crystalline clarity of the skies. A multitude of stars—a billion fierce pinpoints of light—shimmered above, suspended from the satin black canopy of the limitless expanse of the universe. It should have been altogether magnificent; indeed, it was the wellspring of inspiration, the primal womb that birthed music and poetry. But not for me. I hated the Florida sun. I hated the greasy stickiness of sunblock and sweat, the sand in my shoes and ears, the fat tourists, the garbage, and all the little irritations that conspired to make the beach experience miserable.

So we stood there as I grew increasingly restless. A few hundred yards away another couple was sitting along the shoreline and acting like they should on such a night. She pulled on my arm and pointed towards them.

"Look," she said, "isn't that pretty?"

I grunted something and she took it as an affirmation. She tugged on my arm again and headed towards the shore.

"Come on," she continued, "let's go sit down. Take off your shoes."

"Let's not. We'll get all wet sitting there."

"Good. C'mon, let's go. We can just talk for a while."

The words had probably always been there, rotting my insides like a dark vitriol seeking escape. Maybe, at that moment, they reached a critical mass and exploded with an acid fury.

"Talk? About what? Music? Sometimes I wonder how you can go on listening to that crap that they play all day. Don't you ever get tired of hearing about love and dancing and crap like that?" I said it half-jokingly but felt it was true. She looked at me in disbelief.

"What do you mean? You listen to the radio too and you talk about the same things that they sing about."

"Don't you understand? None of it means anything. It's very easy to sing

about the homeless in the ghettos or people starving in Africa, but it's all hype. The only reason that any of these songs get on the radio is because some fat asshole thought that it would make money. I'm sick of hearing about racism and the environment—none of it matters anyway. It's all just for money and I have no money and you don't either and each time we buy another song we're just supporting some rich bastard who's sitting in his jacuzzi."

She was silent for a moment, then: "Money doesn't buy happiness. OK, so they're better off, that doesn't make them any happier."

"Yes it does. It's just a lie that it doesn't, a lie that they feed you so that you don't question what's going on. Yes, they are happy; they have nothing to be sad about."

"So you're saying that you're not happy now?"

I should have seen the trap and avoided it but my mind was so clouded with a foolish desperation that I only drove my icy dagger deeper and deeper into her.

"No I'm not. I hate where I am. I hate where I work. I hate almost everything about my life."

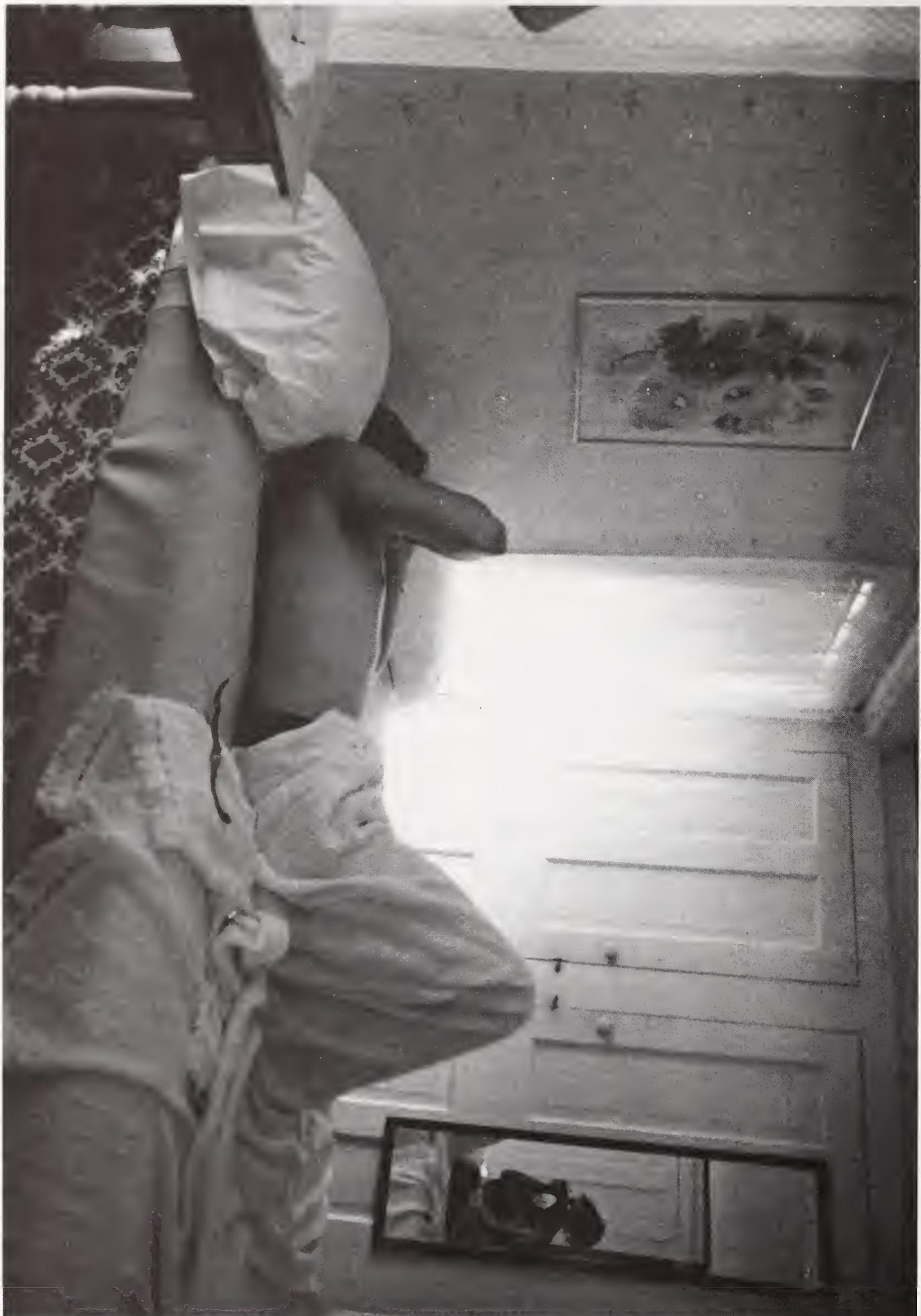
Afterwards followed in minute detail the age-old hope and loss scenario. It hardly matters now, anyway. Things changed...for her at least.

I work in a warehouse still. Every day I punch in at 8:00 AM, or a little afterward, and make my way to the company lunchroom. The coffee is fine on most days, but the doughnuts are usually stale. Someone left a glass of water on the microwave and overnight a cockroach fell in and drowned. Today, a shipment of boxes from Hialeah will arrive and I will probably have to put in a few hours of overtime to help unload. I don't mind. Overtime pay is pretty good.

Gypsy Rose

- Jaikishen Ramlakhan -

tousled locks of russet sable
prance 'round and playfully hide her face
beauty like a gossamer bubble
for enchanted men to chase
snow lily skin spiced with cinnamon
blushes velvet cherry like the sunset sky
tonight memories held ransom by oblivion
drowned in muscatel, mind will fly
eyes filled with cold sapphire
at runaway fates had crystal gaze
sparkle and flirt to set me on desire
this gypsy rose moves in mysterious ways
laurel of latticed lavender held in her hand
ready to crown the next harlequin
to fall at her bare feet and kiss the salt of the sand
to taste her sultry lips sweet of sin
high stakes of roulette the deeper she'll spin
this sultana of revelry under full selene
upon lucre i'll serenade her with my mandolin
if she plays her tambourine



"Untitled" B&W Photograph by Susan Gunter

Chambers

- Vashti Alezannah -

There are chambers of my heart like
Summer cottages, only Summer never comes again
And the spirits stay on anyway, remembering



"Walkabout" Computer Art by Mark Jette'

Opera

- Vivian Valvezan -

so you will see that
i am in fact
happy without
you,
i will act
in a manner that you are
quite accustomed
to. i will pretend
to be naive.
i'll sing off key.
i'll let my anger
glaze my eyes so
you can say
how much you
like them that way.
i'll give you lines
to think about.
then you can say
that i am in fact
happy
without you
and that i am
here, still
melodramatic,
and still acting.
don't you
just miss me?

The Face of God

- Dallas Moore -

A soft breeze carrying the faint, sweet scent of gardenia and still holding the previous night's slight chill, played softly across my face. I sat with my back resting against an old wooden rain barrel that had been in the same spot on Grandma's porch for as long as my young mind could remember. The yard was covered in a thick layer of greenery. Dew hung from each blade of grass, glistening with the reflected rays of the still gentle, morning sun. A stone path led from the steps of the porch to a redwood picnic table, sheltered beneath the boughs of an ancient ficus tree. A large staghorn fern hung suspended from one of the massive lower limbs.

I reached absently behind me, my hand making contact with the cool metal frame of a slingshot resting securely in the back pocket of my cut-off jeans. The frame was Y-shaped, with two strips of rubber running from the tips of the Y to a small pouch of black leather. I glanced down at the two remaining pebbles that lay beside me, then up at the Coke can sitting, unmolested, atop the picnic table. Holding the slingshot in my right hand, I picked up one of the small stones with my left hand and placed it in the leather pouch. Squeezing the pouch and its deadly contents between my left thumb and index finger, I extended my right arm. Taking careful aim at the can, I fired. I was rewarded with a resounding "crack," and a leaf from the staghorn

fell to the ground. I leaned back against the barrel and emitted a deep sigh of disgust. I had taken 29 shots at the can and missed 29 times.

As I sat, brooding over my "marksmanship", the still silence of morning was suddenly shattered by the shrill cries of a bird. I looked up to find a bluejay perched on the limb from which the staghorn was suspended. My mood darkened to anger as my feathered antagonist continued its piercing clamor. In my mind, that irritating sound had become scornful laughter directed at my comical ineptness with the slingshot. My anger heightened with the thought that such an insignificant creature should ridicule me.

The metamorphosis from anger to rage was swift. Snatching up the last stone, I fired blindly at my winged tormentor. To my utter astonishment, the frenzied shot found its intended target. I watched with irrepressible excitement as the bluejay toppled from its perch. "Yes," I cried with youthful exuberance. Springing to my feet, I ran over and plucked my trophy from its resting place.

I was stunned by the soft, weightless creature I held. The rich blue plumage cooled my passion instantly. Warmth radiated from the white, down-covered breast. I watched as the body of this winged being convulsed, then became still. What started as an inaudible death rattle was a tormenting scream of indignation by the time it pierced my

soul. The fragrant, cool wind caressing my face but a moment before, had been replaced by stifling heat and an odor that, to the mind of a ten year old, was the sickeningly sweet smell of death. Fear gripped me and I looked toward the house to see if anyone had witnessed my atrocious transgression. Pivoting, I ran to a row of hibiscus shrubs that bordered my grandmother's house. I gently placed the still form under the bush, thinking to hide the evidence of my crime.

I was turning to walk away when a cloud passed in front of the sun. Looking up, I could see a dark speck gliding effortlessly through the sky. As I watched, I began to wonder which was the more significant creature, the one who soared so freely in the lofty heights above, or the one below, chained to the earth by physical limitations. My gaze strayed to the single cloud in an otherwise lucid sky. To my pre-adolescent imagination, the cloud had taken shape, to become the face of God, looking down in judgement on my appalling actions. Tears of sorrow and remorse streamed from my eyes as I silently pleaded for forgiveness. I slowly turned to the bush. The bluejay was gone.

The Unforgettable, Unforgivable

- Josephine Billisi -

As I look in through the mirror,
 I search past images I see.
 I vision a childhood era
 And a little girl crying on her knees.
 Wondering why she cries,
 My eyes widen for me to see,
 But then I realize
 That the little girl is me.
 Again I question the fears
 That can cause so much pain within.
 As the picture becomes clear,
 I witness the cause of her sin.
 There was a man before her,
 Lying cold and still.
 This man was her father,
 The one she decided she must kill.
 Beside the body lay the gun;
 I glanced at it with fear.
 Now the images disappeared.
 That night I had dreamed
 Of a man who created a world of sadness
 To a girl that cried and screamed
 As her father beat her helpless.
 His thoughts were not pure,
 As he moved in closer.
 Now the child was sure
 Her father would molest her.
 She lay there with shame;
 Fire ran through her veins.
 One man was to blame
 For why she felt insane.
 Only grief, only sorrow,
 She knew what must be done.
 She thought of the peaceful tomorrow
 When her worries would be gone.
 She aimed the shot between his eyes
 As her hands began to shiver.
 Then she said her good-byes
 As her finger pulled the trigger.
 Now I look in through the mirror again
 And see not a child, but a scarred woman.
 A young woman without any family or friends,
 All because of the tortures brought by one man.



"Kelli and Mia" Pen & Ink Drawing by Shari Murphy

Lust

- David Norrie -

What O' what is this thing called LUST,
who do you LOVE, who do you TRUST?

Driven by DESIRE, tempted by sight,
that like turns to LUST with the arrival of night.

Deep down inside builds a fire within,
guided by touch, fearful of SIN.

Go with the feeling, savor the TASTE,
this is a chance I don't want to waste.

My mind is jumping and her body surprising,
the eyes and the temperature aren't the only things rising.

INSTINCTS take over with our bodies in SWEAT,
be sure this is right, 'cause you may not live to regret.

INSIDE one another, souls united as one,
we think to ourselves, O' what have we done?

The PINNACLE is here and my heart skips a beat,
we let out a scream at the end of our feat.

As we lie here naked and pull up the quilt,
the question arises, HAPPINESS or GUILT?



"Unreal" Pencil Drawing by Joseph Nieves

Young Guns

- Brian Goodstein -

Young men, fighting in anger
No choice, drafted to die
Eighteen year olds with poised machine guns
Killing machines, proving their might
Population control, that's all it is
What's a few thousand lives
Nothing is told of the massive carnage
As the media spills out the lies
Planes flying high, deafening guns blare
Men pray for battle to cease
Food getting low, morale even lower
Missing their loved ones overseas
Insanity fills the men's one tracked minds
As they watch their best friends die
Young children get caught in the crossfire
Who barely had a taste of life
When a soldier dies, he's no longer a man
Just a number in the government's eye
Families get photostat letters to home
To tell of their child who has died

The One-Nine Hundred Boo-Boo

- Jessica Gray -

Puberty affects us in some of the most peculiar ways. Physical factors can be understood and basically experienced by everyone. The emotional and mental factors are more evasive. It is unlikely that you understand your actions anymore as an adult than you did back then. Everybody has different experiences, ranging from the mild to the extremes.

With the initiation of puberty, increased awareness of one's sexuality and the opposite sex occurs. Usually girls are the first to have this interest bloom. No matter how much parents prepare for this, when the time comes they find themselves shocked when little Sally starts chasing boys. It was only yesterday she was in torn jeans and pigtails singing:

"God made flowers,
God made toys,
God made rivers,
God made boys"
(but we all make mistakes)

Then, all of a sudden, she's wearing tight miniskirts and make-up, looking like a baby hooker.

Puberty is frustrating for girls in particular. When they first try to impress the boys, their efforts go unnoticed because the boys are too busy making obscene sounds under their armpits. By the time the boys catch up, the girls are so disgusted by them that they revert to the old philosophy that they had when they were five.

I always considered myself for-

tunate not being totally obsessed with the opposite sex. I like men, but I have other interests as well. Eventually, someday, I will probably settle down. I don't think I will ever be a romantic about love or marriage. My comparison to marriage is a 7-11 store. You may not get much variety, but it is accessible at all hours.

Even I, at times, am at the mercy of my hormones. At these times, my logic is gagged and restrained as my more primitive self takes over. It is usually quite obvious, as I show all the symptoms...drooling, a crazed look in my eyes, and doing the most unspeakable acts to poor, innocent grapes. I dread these times. The few times that this has happened, I have put myself in dangerous peril. You see, I cannot be happy making little mistakes. I have to make masterpieces, so I have something to tell my grandchildren. I have been lucky, as my logic has so far been able to escape and scream, "HOLD IT!!!"

The incident which I am about to relate takes place one summer when I was about twelve years old. I think I was going through a very odd phase then, as this was the second incident in three months. You would have thought I would have learned my lesson the first time. I had been led by a weird security guard into a deserted portable at my school. Though I had managed to escape by pretending to have an asthma attack, the incident apparently didn't scar me too much. Here I was three months later getting into a similar scrape.

One day I was looking through a college newspaper out of boredom. None of the articles was of any particular interest to me, but the subject matter was typical concerns of college students. If I recall, there was an advertisement for condoms in every color (flourescent or regular), size, flavor, and for every occasion. There were also a few articles advocating for some worthy cause that was being worn out. Short stories of repressed sexual fantasies, activities going on at school, advertisements of various strip clubs, and other needed information blared through the newsprint. In the midst of all of this, there was a section for the personal ads for the lonely, the odd, and the perverted. Normally I am not interested in this section and usually skip it. However, I was suffering from the affliction **Horniness Hormonus**, which sparked a sudden interest.

I'm sure at one time most of us have been interested in these personal ads. We've heard many jokes and horror stories about them, but was that the way it really was? I have to admit that I found it very difficult to believe that a successful millionaire suffering from brain cancer, who wanted to find that very special someone to leave his inheritance to, would have a problem. Likewise the voluptuous blonde with a size six waistline and great personality. I am sure that it is one of Life's great mysteries, along with the Loch Ness Monster and how a person can live without a brain (in which researchers are studying Dan Quayle's birth certificate).

In defense of the ads, perhaps it is possible for a person to be so irresistible that he/she has to resort to such methods to get a mate. Perhaps with the fast-paced society, people don't have time to

bother with the single's scene, and these ads provide the opportunity to screen applicants. Or perhaps the stereotype is correct, and there is a very good reason why these people have a problem getting a mate. That was the impression I got when I read some of these ads. I began to visualize a scenario:

"So, John," a woman asks, twirling the phone cord with her finger, "what do you do for fun?"

John replies, "I hide the bodies."

My personal viewpoint of personal ads is that they are another form of safe sex. I don't know whether most people who call or place ads are really serious about it. Using your imagination seems to be a popular method of safe sex, which is full proof against pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases. The cartoon dog Grimmy has another method which works just as well. This method requires attaching yourself to somebody's leg.

To this day I cannot understand why I called. It was bad enough that most of these people were schizophrenic, but it was expensive as well. I believe that it was a dollar for the first minute, and a dollar forty-nine each additional minute. I would like to plead insanity, or perhaps claim that I was possessed by demons. Whatever influence I was under, I called a few of the numbers. Worse, I had to pick the really strange. I couldn't go for Joe Blow, the successful executive. No, I had to go for a modern-day Marquis de Sade, as his ad reveals. It read:

SPANKER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Handsome SWM 35, intelligent & well groomed seeks naughty girl 18-35 who craves sound over the knee spankings. This

discreet stern man is strong willed & dominating but rewards with special care. No need to fantasize anymore, get the attention you desire. Beginners don't hesitate I understand what you long for and will fulfill your needs so let's talk. I'm clean, in good shape, & I expect the same, enjoy all forms of B & D. Submissive lesbian couples welcome.

I also called another ad, this time a woman. While I have never been attracted to women, I had never met a lesbian before. I was curious what they were like. I suppose I was convinced that they were different somehow, which can probably be blamed on my pious grandparents' upbringing. I don't know what I was expecting to be different, but I wanted to call up one and pick her brain.

The woman called later that night. She identified herself as Nina. She was pleasant enough, but I was rather disappointed in her. She was rather unremarkable. She didn't, from her description, have purple testicles or anything that made her spectacularly different from most women. Then again, she was bi-sexual, as I later found out. Perhaps "bi's" weren't inflicted with the deformities suffered by homosexuals that my "holier-than-thou" grandparents had told me about.

This was my thought process then. Now I realize there is no difference save sexual preference. However, at that foolish age, I believed the tales my grandparents told me about homosexuals. I believed that along with the tales that if a black and white couple had a baby together, the baby would come out polka dotted.

Had I been serious about my intentions, I probably would have been

upset with Nina. Nina later revealed to me that the reason why she had placed the ad was because her boyfriend wanted to do a threesome. She had not mentioned that in her ad. I chatted with Nina and her boyfriend, who had a voice like Pee-Wee Herman, a few times. I have to admit that I learned many alternate uses for frozen hot dogs and baby bottles.

I was out when "Spanker Extraordinaire" called. Instead, my mother answered the phone. Needless to say, my mother was quite ignorant of what I had done. However, she was suspicious, as I was being rather secretive. I guess she was also curious why my face was always turning a flaming beet red when I was on the phone. She answered the phone, and was quite taken by surprise when a male voice greeted her with an enthusiastic "Hello!" I did not have men calling me often. In fact, the last time I had a boy call me was in third grade. It had been a while, and it was easy to understand why my mom was so startled.

Meanwhile, "Spanker Extraordinaire" was convinced my mother was me. My mother informed him that she was not, but my mother. While she remained polite, she was becoming paranoid. While many people have mistaken my mother and me on the phone because our voices sound alike, she still thought that this guy should obviously tell it was not me. I suppose he didn't quiet her suspicion by persisting that she was me, and I was being coy. She kept informing him that she was not me. When she could get a word in edgewise, she asked him a few questions. Who was he? How did he know her daughter? What were his intentions?

It must have finally occurred to

him that this was indeed my mother. He then asked if she would leave a message, to which she reluctantly agreed. "Spanker Extraordinaire" turned out to be a man named Roger. My mother, still disturbed, called him back a few minutes later.

She said, "Roger, you are aware that my daughter is only twelve years old, aren't you?"

I'm sure this must have been a shock to Roger. I had lied on the message and had said I was eighteen. However, he recovered and assured my mom that he was well aware of my age, and that he was only fifteen. This was a lie, of course, as his ad had said he was thirty-five.

When my mother picked me up, she informed me that my friend Roger had called. I looked at her blankly and asked, "Roger who?"

Roger? I didn't know any Rogers. The only Roger I knew was Roger Collins, a character from my favorite series *Dark Shadows*. Of course, it would be impossible for him to call me. It suddenly dawned on me who Roger probably was, and to save myself I said, "Oh! Roger! I had forgotten that I had given him my number!"

My mother did not believe any of this. The one disadvantage of having a good rapport is that she can always tell when I am lying. Her suspicions were confirmed when she asked me a simple question that stumped me. She asked what my new friends looked like. I had no idea, save what they told me, which was very little. Nina had been so vague about her boyfriend that all I could say was that he had a nice chest. When she told me all that had transpired between Roger and her, I didn't know whether to scream or to laugh. I kept wondering

how much she knew. How much did he know? Yet, it was all so hysterically funny.

I finally got the nerve to call Roger back. If I had any sense, I should not have bothered. The first thing that I said when he answered was, "You can hang up if you want to!"

It is obvious that I did not write the book on the best pick-up lines. Roger thought it was amusing though. Roger did not question me about my age, but I quickly gave some story that my mother had gone from a middle age crisis to senility.

I have to admit, despite myself, I was charmed by him. He was a psychotic, chauvinistic pig, but he was a very charming and charismatic chauvinistic pig. He also had a very sexy voice. The most humiliating thing about the whole incident was that it showed how naive I was. Of course, I was only twelve years old. Most people are naive at that age. I doubt anyone could expect me to have all the knowledge of Xaviera Hollander.

All this, though, was to Roger's benefit. He pulled quite a number on me, and I didn't even realize it until it was over. When I asked for his last name, he said it was Iudi. I would later learn that there was a birth control device called an IUD. He also told me when I asked about his background that he had gone to a girls school. Unless he had a sex change, that would have been impossible. This did not occur to me at the time, though.

I also did not know there was a cheaper way of doing this. As a comedian once said, "Call up anyone at two in the morning, and they will be more than willing to talk dirty to you for free."

After I got off the phone with

Roger that night, my curiosity turned to fear when I realized the possible danger I had put myself into. My fear spawned a whole batch of scenarios in my mind. Every unsolved murder case that I had ever seen on America's Most Wanted came up.

I imagined myself being found by some hikers in the Florida Everglades in some shallow pit. I heard distinctly the voice of Dwight Lauderdale in these scenarios, reporting the gruesome discovery:

"Two men hiking through the Florida Everglades today made a grisly discovery of the remains of a murder victim. The two men immediately notified the police by sending up smoke signals. This just in—the victim is reported to be a white female about 12-15 years old. She is 5'2 and has brown hair. She was wearing a red "You've Come a Long Way, Baby" t-shirt, blue jeans, no socks, and black dress shoes."

I imagined my mother receiving a call from a policeman who says, "Mrs. Stitt, we are pleased to inform you that we have found your daughter. She's been raped, murdered, and mutilated, but we did find her...or what was left of her. I'm afraid the coyotes and vultures found her first. We did find her though. Don't be too upset, Mrs. We're all going to die, you know. And you can always have another child. By the way, I'm stopping by Dunkin Donuts. Want anything?"

I imagined my mother and step-father, in their despair, committing harikari with the kitchenware.

I imagined my pen pal Jodie writing a nice chatty letter to me, describing her boring existence. My mother would have to write her a letter (before she killed herself) that would sound some-

thing like this:

Dear Jodie,

Much has happened to my daughter since you've written. She was murdered. I am sad to say that in her condition, there is no way possibly that she can maintain your friendship. I'm going to go commit suicide now, so have a nice life. Have a nice death. Have a nice afterlife if there is one.

Yours,
Mrs. Stitt

All this was going through my mind. I had to get out of this scrape, but I didn't know how. Unfortunately, both Nina and Roger had taken a liking to me.

My first idea was to scare them away as I had done with that boy who had called me in third grade. That had been unintentional, a result of my discomfort on the phone. There was a huge conversation gap and I, wanting to awe him with my intelligence, decided to start a philosophical discussion with him. So I asked, "Did you ever think about dying?"

It was doubtful that he had. Death is far from what little eight year old boys think about. Needless to say, he never spoke to me again.

I quickly discarded that idea, as Roger would probably not be intimidated by such a question. In fact, I could imagine him replying in a husky voice, "No, have you? I can arrange it if you are curious. A girl in Kansas wondered the same thing, so I killed her. That is why I am wanted by the police. Don't worry, I'm all better now. I won't make the same mistake twice. Next time I won't get caught."

I had managed to take care of

Nina by myself. I had apologized and explained I was having second thoughts. Nina was very pleasant about it, and that was taken care of. Roger wouldn't be that easy to get rid of. He was very stubborn, and I always became dumb when I was on the phone with him.

When all hope is lost, there is one person who can offer salvation. That person can deal with people like Roger. All you need to do is call one word. That word is, "MMMMM OOOOOOOO OMM MMMMM MIIIIIIIEEEEEEEE!!!"

Of course, I didn't know who I feared more, my mother or Roger. I did finally tell my mother, who thought it was hysterical. She was actually relieved, because what she had imagined on what was going on was much worse.

My mother handled Roger. She called him up and told him to stay away from her daughter. To reinforce the threat, she also said I was jailbait, and she wouldn't hesitate to call the police. It is a safe bet that Roger probably already had some problems with the police. I doubt he would want more. He got the message.

An interesting thing that my mother told me. If you get Roger at seven-thirty in the morning, he sounded like Elmer Fudd. Apparently that sexy voice was part of the act as well.

Not only did the whole experience hurt my pride, it hurt my pocket-book. I paid that portion of the phone bill, which came to twenty dollars. I guess compared to the price I might have paid, it wasn't very much.

We all learn from our mistakes. I know I have. It took a very long time for me to get over the embarrassment. It makes for a good story to tell my children and grandchildren.

Of course, I'll probably lie just a teensy bit to make myself look better.

I Am Old

- Jennifer Emerson -

I am old.
You are my daughter.
Please treat me with love.

Please don't yell at me in public.
I still have dignity.

I see your impatience, your intolerance.
I'm sorry I'm so slow.

You decide my meals, I eat what you tell me.
I can't see to cut the meat.

You choose my clothes; the colors don't suit me.
My fingers can't do the buttons.

Do you remember
when you tore your dress getting ready for prom?
You cried and cried, your night was ruined.
I sewed your dress before your date arrived.
How pretty you were.

Do you remember
the bogeyman under your bed at night?
I sat up with you so you could sleep.
You were only five.

Do you remember
when your child was born?
I was there then too, with you, to hold your hand.
It was a long night.

My nights come early now.
I am put to bed after dinner.

I lie awake and listen to the house
here in the dark of my room.



"El Chalan" Charcoal Drawing by Patricia Pallete

International Student

- Shahid Latif -

I am still alive
You stoned me
Poisoned me
Burned me
Entombed me
Crucified me
Yet, like the truth
I am alive, eternal.

My face, my eyes, my arms,
My lips
Are all alive
I, the bright star of the night
Fell shattered and tattered,
Yet I go on glowing, shining.

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